

VZCZCXRO6197
OO RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH
DE RUEHBK #1521 1371228
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 161228Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3059
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 001521

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: PRIVY COUNCILOR COMMENTS ON POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Eric G. John, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a lunch meeting on May 15, the Ambassador briefed Privy Council President Prem on US assistance for Burmese cyclone victims, and underscored our concerns about the possibility of another coup. GEN Prem showed great interest in US humanitarian relief efforts. He strongly denied that there would be another coup in Thailand.

Contrary to some press reports, Prem appeared to be in generally good health. Prem, who is generally believed to have provided at least moral support for the 2006 coup, has kept a low profile in recent months. Nonetheless, he remains very influential, and we believe it was useful to underscore to him our concerns over the rumors of another military intervention. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) During a lunch with Ambassador on May 15, Privy Council President GEN Prem Tinsulanonda commented somewhat more candidly than usual on the current political situation. Prem, who has been the target of fierce criticism from Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej, displayed more bemusement than anger in commenting on the outspoken and loquacious PM. Samak has positioned himself politically as a die-hard monarchist and boasts of his family's Palace connections. In light of this, the Ambassador asked whether Samak actually enjoyed a close relationship with the King. (The Ambassador also asked whether Samak, during the PM's regular audiences with the King, delivered the same long monologues that he often did when meeting foreign officials.) Prem said that the PM did not have a special relationship with the King, that he did indeed talk at great length during the royal audiences, but added that, "the King doesn't mind listening to him." Prem also showed no animus to the new Parliament speaker, elected to replace Yongyuth Tiyaiphairat, who faces possible disqualification for alleged election fraud (septel). Prem described the 80-year-old Chai Chidchop, a stalwart of the ruling People's Power Party (PPP), as a hard worker who could learn to handle the speakership.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador noted the disquieting public speculation about the possibility of another coup, and emphasized how disastrous this would be for Thailand. Prem replied firmly that we should not pay any attention to these rumors, and affirmed that there would not/not be another coup.

¶4. (C) GEN Prem showed a great interest in the US assistance to Burma cyclone victims, asking about our relief efforts, and about any obstacles put in place by the Burmese government. Prem clearly appreciated a read-out on the Cobra Gold exercise.

¶5. (C) Comment: We will continue to make clear our concerns about the overheated coup rhetoric currently circulating. We cannot expect much candor from the usually enigmatic GEN

Prem, but at least he said the right things in this meeting. During the political crisis of 2006, Prem made several controversial speeches that some thought encouraged the military to act against the Thaksin government, and he is widely believed to have given moral support, at least, to the coup plotters. He has kept a much lower profile in recent months --fortunately, in our view -- but he remains extremely influential, and we believe it was useful to have the opportunity to underscore to him the disastrous implications of another military intervention. End comment.

¶6. (SBU) Bio note: The press reported that Prem had been hospitalized with a possible serious illness last month, but he appeared to be in reasonably good health for a man in his 80's. He was suffering from laryngitis and spoke very softly, consistent with the official reports that he was only suffering from bronchitis.

JOHN